

# Practitioner Briefing 4: Linking with Businesses & Tailoring to Employer's Needs

This briefing provides tips to practitioners in West London and UK to highlight best practices in social inclusion through employment. It is drawn from a wider research on *Good Practices in Social Inclusion through Employment*, using examples of Roma integration. The study is published as a separate paper for policy makers together with map of relevant organisations and further reading. The study is a part of the ESF funded project *New Pathways to Work in West London*, led by Ealing Council (2009-2013).

**Summary:** Effective and sustainable employability work with vulnerable groups greatly benefits from intensive work and engagement with local employers, alongside supporting individual needs. This is so because this is a two-way process. A frequently made mistake of the past is to deliver training in skills that match the individuals only or the availability of teachers. In fact, recent experience shows that engaging early on the employers brings about 80% success in employment and aids sustainable employment.

## **Context**

West London is an economically vibrant region, with high numbers of businesses, Europe's largest industrial location at Park Royal, key employment centres at Heathrow airport and Westfield, and major infrastructure projects such as CrossRail. Key employment sectors include: retail, leisure and tourism, hotels and restaurants, finance and insurance, banking, transport, fresh foods, health, education, social work, public administration, IT, manufacturing, construction, vehicle repairs, media and business services. Despite this prosperity, there are significant pockets of worklessness and deprivation. Groups such as lone parents, disabled, young people, Black and Asian Minority Ethnic people are particularly affected. Efforts to improve the employability of these groups have to be tailored to the needs of employers and local labour markets.

## **About the Practice**

Evidence suggests that helping vulnerable groups to access sustainable jobs involves a careful two-way process of supporting individuals and involving employers. Alongside helping people overcome barriers to work, practitioners also need to undertake intensive engagement and support with prospective employers. Thus, they ensure that there is a demand and buy-in for the training and employment support they deliver. Whilst labour- (and cost-) intensive and requiring specialist skills of marketing and business negotiation, the benefits of this way of working for both the disadvantaged individuals and for the employers are numerous: to say the least, the disadvantaged people gain more secure opportunities, the success after matching employers and candidates is about one of two candidates on each placement; and the employers get a free reliable mediation service that is tailored to their needs. As a result Local Authorities

gain a stronger economy because there are less unemployed people and better staffed businesses.

### ***How can this be done?***

#### **Employers' needs assessment and engagement**

- Regular labour market research to gauge local skills shortages and employer needs.
- Building up a broad network of local companies and employers as well as secondary education, further education and higher education institutions and their career services.
- Education, apprenticeships and vocational training programmes (for young people and adults) should be tailored to address long-term skills shortages in local areas:
  - London shortages in creative industries, hotels and restaurants, retail, business services, transport and communications.<sup>1</sup>
  - UK-wide shortage of social workers, teachers, nurses, metal workers, welders, cooks and electricians.<sup>2</sup>
- Involving local employers and businesses in the design of social inclusion and employability programmes, or as delivery partners so that support is based on demand.
- Subsidised job placements can be effective in engaging employers and taking on workers from the long-term unemployed and vulnerable groups.

#### **Mediation**

- Offering long term, at least 1 year apprenticeships or vocational training in real work environments, where people can build practical employment skills alongside education and show their skills and capacities.
- Job matching is a careful two-way process linking the skills and profiles of individuals with those of companies and employers. This is to ensure that the right candidates get the right positions straight away and thus save resources and time.
- Job brokerage that works at appropriate levels for different clients needs e.g. those with mental health needs will need intense and sometimes lengthy support.
- Intensive mediation with companies and employers, including face-to-face work to build relationships and engagement in 'Job Fairs'.
- Inviting businesses and employers to give presentations and training or former clients to share their experiences of work placements as a part of your employment programme.

---

<sup>1</sup> UKBA. (2011). *Shortage Occupation List*. UK Border Agency. Available at: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/workingintheuk/shortageoccupationlistnov11.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## ***How can this be done?***

### **Candidates' assessment**

- Thorough tailored selection processes to assess people's skills and needs.
- Dynamic and innovative ways of assessing skills: relying less on formal criteria, seeing people's strengths and potential, and valuing different kinds of experience.

### **Support to candidates**

- Providing holistic support to people's wider needs e.g. health, housing, family.
- Tailored training in soft-skills needed by employers e.g. how to present and design a CV, covering letters and filling in application forms, interview presentation skills, time and project management, planning, managing risks, liaising with stakeholders and clients.
- One-to-one tailored support and training e.g. career development, advice on job searching, communication, body language, improving confidence and self-esteem.
- Volunteer business mentors from leading organisations from relevant sectors, to support individuals throughout placements and in new jobs.
- After-care and long-term support for both individuals and employers after the placement.
- Opportunities for progression in further training and education, positions in the companies, position in your own programme and so on.
- A variety of events to celebrate achieved milestones and successes.

### **Making the Practice Work Locally**

The West London context provides rich opportunities through a variety of employers, including large employers. The practice works well but it can be further enriched with the components described above.

**Tailoring to employers' needs to match them with the right candidates: ESF Heathrow Academy (Hillingdon Council).** The project aims at engaging hard-to-reach groups and to provide them with training, support and link with Heathrow Airport (around 76,000 jobs) tailored to the needs of the employers at the airport. It specifically aims to help people with low skills and economically inactive people. The team looked at the gaps in the area of employment in the borough and developed a programme that could address them. The services delivered within the project are: Advice, information and guidance; One-to-one personal support (including soft skills such as developing plans about the future); Pre-employment training matched with the needs of the employers; Airport training; Help with practicalities (e.g. ensuring evidence for five years' traceable history); Mock interviews; Matching candidates to jobs; and Follow up mentoring. It is not a part of the project, but the Heathrow practice is that after 3 months of employment at the airport,

employees qualify to apply for higher level training schemes run by Heathrow Academy or directly by the airport employers.

To help practitioners implement this practice or improve existing work, there are some key success factors and also challenges to consider.

Success factors	Challenges to consider	Tips on overcoming challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active community engagement and outreach to access vulnerable groups, working through trusted NGOs and community mediators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The recession means that it is difficult getting work for the mainstream population, let alone disadvantaged groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High skill sectors are not affected by job shortages – investing in higher education schemes as a part of long-term career development plans to complement current provision is an excellent option.</li> <li>Engage with businesses to find out about job opportunities that may be not advertised.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing effective information sharing between organisations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The delivery of local work programmes involves a complex range of providers and organisations, so there is a risk of duplication of effort.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess your competitors; identify what makes your services unique and which local organisations can complement your services through referrals and work in multi-disciplinary teams.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multi-agency partnerships in job brokerage to embed projects into local communities, access &amp; support hardest to reach groups and build links with employers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employers and businesses can have very low motivations to take on less skilled workers from vulnerable groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop evidence-based and logical arguments to present the pluses of your approach.</li> <li>Introduce successful examples and references from other clients, ideally in person.</li> <li>Invite employers to visit the training you deliver to assess first hand the quality.</li> <li>Organise events where employers can meet in person and talk face-to-face with candidates.</li> <li>Develop excellent publicity based on the above principles which employers can review in their own time.</li> <li>Wherever possible include subsidised internships and apprenticeships.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using incentives to attract employers e.g. raising their profile, PR opportunities, financial incentives in subsidising employment and training of new workers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subsidised work placements can be financially unsustainable in tight economic climates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for alternative funding from charities and corporate social responsibility programmes of large companies.</li> <li>Engage candidates in fundraising events which will further provide them with important real-life skills.</li> <li>Emphasise the long-term benefits for the company rather than the short-term effect of saving a salary for a certain period.</li> <li>Investing in building strong profiles for the candidates you promote by developing their 'soft' skills in parallel with the vocational skills.</li> </ul>

Success factors	Challenges to consider	Tips on overcoming challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Robust anti-discrimination work and awareness raising with employers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some employers can have negative attitudes to employing people from vulnerable groups e.g. those with health conditions and disabilities, GRT communities etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is nothing more powerful against bias and stereotypes than the personal contact with candidates: arrange a variety of interviews and social events.</li> <li>Develop Fact Sheets in the form of Myths&amp;Realities exploration about the groups with which you work.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People out of work for long periods will need intensive support e.g. how to look for opportunities, training and confidence building.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular checking in at employment bureaux can be difficult for some people with chaotic lives e.g. urgent demands, caring responsibilities, the costs of travel etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make sure that enrolment and participation in the programme is as little bureaucratic as possible.</li> <li>The logic of the support that works best is inspiration and motivation through interaction and communication, not compulsory measures.</li> <li>Where bureaucracy is inevitable, financial support and facilities need to be provided.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focusing on building positive, emphatic and trusting relationships with clients.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People experiencing complex and multiple needs can feel that some practitioners do not fully understand their circumstances.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accept that the world is not ideal and people will often have difficulties understanding the complex realities of disadvantaged groups.</li> <li>All staff should have a basic training in providing emotional support such as active listening, validating emotions, motivational interviewing, positive reformulation and encouragement.</li> <li>Work in multi-disciplinary, if needed multi-agency teams to build resilience in the members of the disadvantaged groups you work it.</li> <li>Engage in awareness raising activities to make the environment less hostile to disadvantaged groups.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment advisors from a similar background can help engagement e.g. advisors from disabled, BAME or lone parent groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Certain groups can be reluctant to access mainstream services, especially if they have had previous negative experiences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest time and resources, including community mediators, to work with mistrust and self-isolation.</li> <li>Building trust is a process that requires immersing oneself in the areas where the disadvantaged groups are concentrated: experience their and share their difficulties and celebrate with them their successes.</li> <li>Promise what is possible not what is desirable and deliver consistently: over-promising is the main mistake in building trust.</li> <li>Identify local community leaders and work with them for the good of the community.</li> <li>Tailor the mainstream service to the specifics of the group: e.g. instead of recruiting Roma through newspapers, look into places where they gather and spread the word about your services.</li> </ul>

Success factors	Challenges to consider	Tips on overcoming challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued support, encouragement and positive feedback, alongside a proactive approach in maintaining contact &amp; support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People from vulnerable groups and the long-term unemployed can have very low confidence and self-esteem.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build the capacity of your staff to deliver basic emotional support and to provide a constructive feedback.</li> <li>Think of ways to celebrate each milestone and successes both individually and in a group setting: cards, certificates, awards for best projects or just a word of recognition or a picture on facebook makes all the difference.</li> </ul>

**Building a comprehensive support programme: Arete Youth Foundation.** The organization is created in 2005 in the USA, works in Bulgaria since 2005. It implements leadership summer camps for disadvantaged young people, builds a Roma Professional Network of businessmen and students and an Arete Youth Volunteer Programme, organizes exchange placements and delivers scholarships information. In the experience of the organization the best link with businesses is provided through subsidized internships and apprenticeships, in which employers can see in practice the qualities of the candidates - just 'Job Fairs' however fashionable does not work.

**Matching the right candidates with the employers' needs: Bridge with the Business.** This is a Programme that works with Roma young people run by Open Society Institute-Sofia since 2010. It identifies opportunities in the labour market at leading companies in Bulgaria and place Roma young people in internships, with the long-term aim for them being offered employment. The programme provides: Carefully selected Roma interns and assesses their employment and skills needs; Intensive tailored and individual training for the candidates over a long period; Mediation with the companies; Matching individuals with placements; A business counsellor to support candidates through the placement; Publicity and popularisation activities.

*These briefings are prepared by a team at the Tavistock Institute: Laura Stock, Dr Milena Stateva, Dr Kerstin Junge. The briefings are accompany a Research Paper under the title Social Inclusion through Education: Learning from Roma Integration. You are receiving these briefings because we have identified you as a key service provider. To request the paper and the other four briefings or if you do not want to receive further communication from us, please email us at: [hello@tavinstitute.org](mailto:hello@tavinstitute.org)*